

Utilizing The Arts To Teach Black History



John Patterson in a scene from *The Dreamkeeper Speaks: The World of Langston Hughes*, currently on tour through the ACE Touring Program.

One of the most inspiring and instructive stories in Black history is the story of how Carter Godwin Woodson, "the Father of Black History," rose from the coal mines of West Virginia to the summit of academic achievement.

At 17, this young man, the son of former slaves, was an untutored coal miner. At 19, after teaching himself the fundamentals of English and arithmetic, he entered high school and mastered the four-year curriculum in less than two years. At 22, after briefly attending Berea College, he went on to the University of Chicago, where he received bachelor's and master's degrees, and Harvard University, where he became the second Black to receive a doctorate in history.

Most noted for Initiating Negro History Week in 1926, (currently celebrated as Black History Month), Dr. Woodson also founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (1915), and organized the Associate Publishers (1921) to produce textbooks and other supplementary materials on Blacks.

In New Jersey, Woodson's efforts have been immortalized through the efforts of the

Carter G. Woodson Foundation, a statewide cultural organization with headquarters in Newark.

Founded in 1974 by Philip Thomas, former staff member of the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, the foundation was established as an emerging resource center in New Jersey for the presentation of programs in African-American history, culture and art.

"I became very familiar with Dr. Woodson's work while in college," Thomas said, "and was impressed by his determination and commitment to provide an accurate record of African and African-American participation in the development of world civilization. I believed his work should be continued."

The Woodson Foundation works with community groups and elementary and secondary schoolchildren, as well as with college students, providing a speakers bureau, Black women's programs, and African dance, jazz and classical music programs.

The Carter G. Woodson Foundation's most recent innovation is the African-American Cultural Education (ACE) Touring Program, designed to enrich young people's

understanding of African-American heritage via school assembly performances, artists' residencies, workshops, lectures and master classes in theater, dance, music and the literary arts.

"The ACE Touring Program is a unique concept in arts education. We creatively utilize artistic presentations to augment the learning experience in history and geography, to help young people gain an early understanding and appreciation for the performing arts and to assist African-American artists in reaching larger audiences, especially young audiences," noted Thomas.

Selection for the ACE Touring Program's roster of performances is based on the program's content and high artistic quality, and also on the performers' experience in touring and performing in educational settings. Those selected for the 1985 season include: The Nucleus Theater Company's production of *Stepping into Tomorrow*, featuring Yolanda King, daughter of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Attallah Shabazz, daughter of Malcolm X Shabazz. *The Dreamkeeper Speaks: The World of Langston Hughes*, a one-man performance (continued on page 13)

Richard Nanes

Classical Musician with a Modern Touch

London's famed Barbican Centre welcomed two special visitors from New Jersey this past February. Thomas Michalak, conductor of Newark's Cathedral Symphony Orchestra, conducted the London Symphony Orchestra in the European premier of West Orange composer Richard Nanes' SYMPHONY NO. 2 in B MAJOR. Nanes, whose connections with Europe go back to the years when he studied at the famous Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris, sat back and enjoyed the concert.

It is not so unusual these days to open a program and see Nanes listed with more familiar composers such as Bach, Mozart, Mendelssohn and Rachmaninoff. Nanes spoke optimistically about this phenomenon.

"There is a great awakening, a response from music audiences who want fresh, new music. They are tired of hearing the same old thing. How many times can one hear Mendelssohn's String Symphony. Europe is very responsive to the work of contemporary composers. I would love to see the work of New Jersey and American composers performed more often in New Jersey."

As both a classical composer and solo-piano recitalist who performs only his own work, Nanes has received acclaim in the United States and Europe. His compositions

could be termed "neo-romantic", a style particularly associated with contemporary German composers and representing a reaction to the modernism of post-war years.

Music critics are quick to note qualities in his music that evoke the great musical figures of the past—Beethoven, Chopin, Liszt, Rachmaninoff and Bartok, yet according to Richard Pyatt of WNYC Radio, "This is not to suggest that Nanes is imitative, but maybe a bit derivative... he might easily be considered a musical pioneer."

Nanes' style can be traced to his own very personal depths; his mood often determines whether he composes a neo-romantic, a visionary Baroque, or an expressionist composition. He also explains that, "the theme will work in realizing the style. For instance, TRITHEDRAL SYMPHONY NO. 1 in B FLAT was inspired by the fabled lost continent of Atlantis." Music critic Walter Russell wrote, "Mr. Nanes' exquisite touch makes the keyboard into an impressionist's palette in conveying musically the watery depths to which Atlantis has fallen." At the other end of the spectrum is his SYMPHONY NO. 2 in B MAJOR, performed in London, which is said to be "music dissonant" and challenging, with "little allegiance to any conventional symphonic style."

The position of the planets and the earth's gravitational pull also seem to have some-



Richard Nanes

thing to do with the artist's creativity. When Nanes was commissioned by Thomas Michalak and the Cathedral Symphony Orchestra of Newark to compose his third symphony, an original work featuring the brilliant violinist Yehudi Menuhin to be performed at a benefit concert on October 27, 1985, Nanes decided "to begin work in February when Venus will be in orbit. I am planning a large-scale romantic rhapsody 15 to 18 minutes in length, a big broad soaring rhapsody," he told ARTS NEW JERSEY this past January.

Nanes' accomplishments have earned him the International Academie des Beaux Arts 1981 "Composer of the Year" award and the Annual Broadcast Award for Selected Programming in Radio in 1980, as well as honors from the New Jersey Council of Churches in recognition of his service to the Council for composing theme music for several radio and television programs for the Council.

Four recordings of Nanes' work are currently available, including NOCTURNES OF THE CELESTIAL SEAS and FANTASY AND IMPROMPTU NO. 3. All of these have been broadcast often on many stations in the USA. In December 1984 his CONCERTO GROSSO for Chamber Orchestra and Brass Trio was premiered at Alice Tully Hall in New York City.

Success seems to be in the stars for Richard Nanes. ■

By Ronnie Weyl

Utilizing the Arts

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piece based on 80 poems of Langston Hughes, featuring Edward Pierson; *Can I Speak for you, Brother?*, a one-man performance depicting eight great Black American leaders, featuring Phillip Walker; and *Gailman's Newark Dance Theater*, an exciting company of young dancers under the artistic leadership of choreographer Alfred Gailman.

The performances and programs have received nothing short of rave reviews. Cynthia Niv, Dean of Auxiliary Academic Services at Union County College, said of John Patterson's performance, "I was very pleased, and the literature students were very impressed. They saw something they were used to seeing in written form come alive. Many of the students were white," she added, "and they became acquainted with the plights and cultural specifics of another ethnic group. It was extremely beneficial overall."

During the 1985 season, the AGE Touring Program will initiate a special project consisting of a long term, six-week artist residency in a New Jersey urban school district. The purpose of this special project is to establish within the district a presence that

will stimulate continued involvement in the on-going exploration of African-American history, culture and art.

The Woodson Foundation also offers the ACE Showcase which provides both public and private schools and other youth-oriented organizations the opportunity to preview the quality presentations the ACE Touring Program offers. This year's ACE Showcase will be held at Essex County College, Newark, on Saturday, April 27, 1985, 9:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M.

For more information, interested organizations or individuals may call (201) 371-8071 or write to the Woodson Foundation: P.O. Box 1025, Newark, N.J. 07101 for a brochure.

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By Stacey Slaughter